# WORLD CHRONICLE

UNITED NATIONS

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PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Ambassador Mohammad Sahnoun,
Special Representative
of the United Nations Secretary-General
to Somalia.

JOURNALISTS: Raghida Dergham,
Al-Hayat, London

Jon Leyne,
BBC

Afsane Bassir Pour,
Le Monde

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

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SYNOPSIS

**ADDRESSING SOMALI ISSUES**

Ambassador Mohammad Sahnoun, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Somalia, discusses the different political and humanitarian aspects of the Somali problem. He stresses the need for more international involvement in putting an end to the plight of the Somali people. Ambassador Sahnoun believes that preventative diplomacy is the best tool to avert such tragedies as in Somalia.

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**VOICE:** From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Over the last two years, tragedy has engulfed one of the poorest nations in the Horn of Africa - Somalia. The collapse of its central government and the ensuing deadly civil war among its various clans have left hundreds of thousands of people killed or injured. Countless numbers of innocent women and children now face starvation and death. Why has the situation in Somalia reached this point? What must the international community do to put an end to the plight of the Somali people?

Our guest today is one of the central figures in the international efforts to find a solution to the Somali problem. He is Ambassador Mohammad Sahnoun, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Somalia. A national of Algeria, Ambassador Sahnoun will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Raghida Dergham of Al-Hayat of London; John Leyne of the BBC; and Afsane Bassir Pour of Le Monde.

Ambassador Sahnoun, welcome to **WORLD CHRONICLE**. Mr. Ambassador, as you know, there's been quite a bit of criticism of the way that the relief effort for Somalia has been handled. Just a few weeks ago, Mrs. Robinson, the President of Ireland, who accompanied you on a tour of Somalia, was fairly critical of the UN High Commissioner of Refugees for having failed to provide even the most basic facilities for several hundred thousand, or large numbers, at any rate, of refugees on the border with Kenya, who are not affected by the violence in Somalia itself. And there have been

other criticism, including from Africa Watch, of your predecessor, Mr. Jonah, among others. What's your response to these criticisms?

**SAHNOUN:** There's no doubt that there was a failure in responding early enough to the disaster in Somalia. And that delay explained to a large extent why the response now has been a bit clumsy, has not been sufficient, and there have been a number of problems in terms of logistics. It was not organized in time. I think the response now is improving. I think there is certainly a better mobilization of resources. And because of the role of the mass media, people are much better informed of the situation, and funding is coming. And I think that we will see an improvement very soon.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Did this crisis sort of creep up on the international community? Why was there this delay?

**SAHNOUN:** Well, I suppose probably a number of factors. It is certainly a very important question, and I think it should be investigated. The government collapsed in January 1991 in Somalia, and there was practically an absence of power over all these months. We should have intervened, the United Nations should have intervened. What we call "preventive diplomacy" I think should have then been used to try to be a catalyst there between the different forces which were struggling for power, and which were not as dislocated as they are today. There were some homogeneous movement at the time, and therefore maybe it could have been easier to try to resolve the problem. By letting it degrade the way it has, now it's extremely difficult.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Ambassador Sahnoun, we hear these reports about clans in Somalia, and the activities of the warlords, who seem to be a particularly brutal lot. Can you explain a bit what the situation

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is there among the clans and the warlords?

**SAHNOUN:** The Somali society is actually one of the most homogenous in Africa. They have the same language, they use the same language, they have practically the same culture, they have the same religion, largely, and so that is why it surprises more than one to see a society like that, that has so many chances compared to other countries in Africa, dislocate the way it did. I think one of the reasons is certainly the rule, under which the Somalis have lived for over twenty years, which was a total dictatorship. And at that time, nobody cared really about human rights in Somalia, nobody cared about how people were being treated, and whether they had a voice, and whether they had a contribution in ruling their own affairs. Support was given to the regime from different powers because of the strategic position of Somalia at the time during the cold war. And the regime did use tribal factors in order to perpetuate its own rule, and I think contributed very much to planting the seeds of division within the society. Then, after the collapse of the government, because of the long delay in trying to help on the part of the international community, not responding to the situation, that has further dislocated the society into these tribal and clan elements, which now fight practically some of them for survival. It is very different for a small clan not to also resort to violence if they want to defend their territory and defend their own resources. So that's what's happening now in Somalia.

**DERGHAM:** Ambassador, I'd like to follow up on what the UN had done as far as neglecting the situation in Somalia in the past, and you, to use your own words, "as the United Nations watched Somalia descend into this hell", as you personally put it. It continues, it seems, because of the refugees in northern Kenya and hundreds of thousands who are not being looked after. Because, for example, the Pakistani units who have arrived on the scene do not have the

logistics. Where -- what is contributing to this failure? Is it the inexperience of the United Nations, or is it a political decisions, or lack of it, for that matter?

**SAHNOUN:** Well, I think really basically it is because we have taken too long to respond. And it's always very difficult to try to cope with the time which has been lost. I think the -- now they are really doing their best, but it's true that when you take, for instance, the refugees in Kenya only, there are almost five hundred thousand of them. And there are one thousand refugees coming into Kenya daily. So it is a large number and the HCR has also other refugees around the world. So they certainly also complain that they lack resources, and they lack staffing. So we have to use here very much the Non-Governmental Organizations, which are doing a great work. It should be probably on the part of governments to come in a sense to the rescue to the United Nations and add complimentary assistance to what the United Nations is doing. I don't think we can only rely on United Nations agencies in view of the extent of the disaster.

**DERGHAM:** Yes, but in fact the Non-Governmental Organizations have been present in Somalia way before the United Nations got activated there, so they have had more of an experience. The United Nations had always at least some of its agencies raise the excuse of security. Such an excuse doesn't exist in Kenya. It exists in Somalia. But then again, the deployment of forces is very slow, and things are not going as fast as needed. Is this something that you're trying to accelerate, and are you facing any obstacles?

**SAHNOUN:** Well, it is true that UN agencies do not have the same kind of staff that NGOs or the Red Cross have. The Red Cross and NGOs usually use volunteers, people who are ready to go to the bush, people who are ready to take some risk. This is not always

the case with UN staffing, who are civil servants, and they are recruited in that way, and it's normal. I'm not criticizing them because they have not been choosing to do this kind of job. So usually, actually, what agencies do is provide the logistics. The people who are really in charge of distribution of the goods, of making the delivery to the people, organizing the kitchens to help the needy are people who are working with the NGOs, not UN staff. UN staff is largely in charge of logistics. So I think both have to do their job, the UN has to continue the job. There might be a need for the UN maybe to think -- in fact, they have already planned for that, but I think it's not yet implemented -- is to have volunteers to be able to do this kind of work, which NGOs are doing if necessary. But that's another problem.

**LEYNE:** Ambassador, you used that phrase "preventive diplomacy." It's a very popular phrase around the United Nations at the moment, but how can the international community be mobilized to act early enough in situations like this?

**SAHNOUN:******** I can only speak about Somalia, because I've studied the situation, the case, and have been following it. There is no doubt that, as I said before, after the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in January 1991, we had several months there where people were in the capital trying to find the solution. There was nobody there from the UN to be a catalyst, to try to mediate, try to conciliate between the different factions, which were then fairly homogeneous. They were not yet dislocated into clans and subclans as they are today. And therefore I think the solution would have been easier. In fact, there were even some courts from the Djibouti Government, which had tried to have a conference in Djibouti. They even sent somebody here I think to see whether the UN could help in organizing a conference and convening as many people as possible to that meeting from the Somali side. There was no decision at that

time from the UN or United Nations. And that's regrettable. I think we should have been much more dynamic and much more present, and certainly the Security Council should have met. Certainly the Secretariat should have alerted Security Council to that problem, and maybe a mission should have been sent there, and then follow it very closely, monitor it. If we don't do it in other cases, I am just giving this as an example, because I think it's very important in the future when we have cases of this kind that we should intervene very quickly politically before the disaster becomes not only political but also humanitarian, as it is now in Somalia.

**LEYNE:** But as you'll note, governments don't act until they absolutely have to, and the Security Council's certainly got enough things on its plate as of now. How do you get around that problem? How do you get them to react early enough in a situation before it's a really serious crisis?

**SAHNOUN:** I explained it. I think the people who are in charge, who are monitoring crises around the world, should develop some kind of early warning system which would -- they should be then able to alert the Security Council. In fact, I think there is enough in the terms of reference, in the mandate of the Secretariat here, enough power for them to go and look into the situation, to go and examine or offer their good offices. I think there are enough staff here who could do it, and some of them are very able. So I think that should be done, I think that there should be much more freedom of action and much more initiative than has been the case for Somalia.

**POUR:** Ambassador Sahnoun, I'd like to go back to Michael's initial question. I'd be very interested to know what is the dynamics of dealing as you do daily with the two generals who are causing basically the death of thousands of thousands of their own

countrymen by their feuding. Give us a feel of what it's like negotiating with these two men.

**SAHNOUN:** You have first to explain that the situation you have there is not really a political movement, you are not dealing with political leaders. You are literally dealing with warlords, actually. They have only a limited loyalty on the part of their troops. It's really a totally disorganized situation. So therefore, when we deal with these warlords, we discuss with them, and we try to reach a certain agreement, we have to make sure that the other subclans, which are supposed to be under the authority of these warlords, are also going to concur with whatever agreement you have reached with the warlords. So we have to have several parallel negotiations at the same time. They in fact unite only when they have a common enemy. When they don't, when they're not fighting a common enemy, they're almost as divided as they are with the other factors. So it is a very complex situation indeed.

**POUR:** Do they actually sit at the same table with you? Do you manage to get them together, the two main factions?

**SAHNOUN:** Well, there are more than two. I suppose what you're talking about is in Mogadishu basically.

**POUR:** Yes.

**SAHNOUN:** Basically we do have two factions in Mogadishu, one controlling the north of the city and the other controlling the south of the city and the territory around that. They haven't yet met, the two of them haven't met. But beyond that, within each territory there are other subclans, and in fact they are not even meeting sometimes with the others. You take Mogadishu, for instance, south of Mogadishu the airport is under the control of a clan. And

the port is under the control of another clan. And the warlord you're talking about, the general, is in control of the city, but he's eyeing at how could he control the airport or the port, because that would give him more power. But he can't do it, because people are ready to defend the airport or the port. So we have a very complex situation where we -- we don't -- we want -- when the ships come to the port we have to negotiate with the people who are in control of the port, but we have also to negotiate with the people who are in control of the city, because we have to get the food to be distributed within the city. So ....

**LITTLEJOHNS:** The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, our guest is Ambassador Mohammed Sahnoun, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Somalia.

**DERGHAM:** Yes. I was going to follow up on what you're trying to do on the ground, reguarding the security situation, the fact that there are many clans fighting, protecting in fact their own food supplies. Some of them are looting to just feed their families. I understand that you have in mind establishing small security units of Somalis to assist the United Nations forces. Have you started that sort of thing, and have you found any resistance? Or did you find it a nucleus in fact for a police force for the whole of Somalia?

**SAHNOUN:** We have to use -- we have -- several steps to do. The first one is what Afsane was mentioning, and that is trying to negotiate, or trying to have some kind of compromise. It's not always a 100 per cent agreement, but at least some compromise. And we have to sometimes go and speak to the people and put pressure on these leaders from their own people, especially announcing the fact that if they don't let the humanitarian assistance get to the people, they are actually responsible for genocide. So we have to

put this pressure on them to get some kind of compromise, because if you don't have some compromise, working compromise, people will just shoot at you. So you have -- whether you have security guards or not it can become extremely difficult, because you have to understand the Somali environment. People have been already facing hostile environment of inter-culture. And they are prone to use arms, they are prone to use guns. So one has to at least get some kind of minimum understanding with the environment. And then we'd like to have our own UN troops there, which we have -- we are now doing, which we have now in Mogadishu. But we hope that we can get them also to Kismayu, which is the second, very important port for us in the south. But with the troops, some kind of compromise is not enough. We still have to have some kind of Somali security so that they can help the UN troops for the distribution of the food. They can be the intermediary between the UN troops and between the relief agencies and the people. And they can relay whatever messages, whatever information concerning the distribution zone. So these security guards, which we have to organize, unfortunately we still don't have the means to do it.

**DERGHAM:** And are you, as far as your agenda, at least if you were to have your wishes fulfilled, are you hoping for a meeting of the -- basically of the major leaders before the end of the year? I have in mind Mehdi and Edid of course, before the end of the year? Is this a priority to establishing anything else that is the security units, or to involve the intellectuals, as you're trying to do? What are the priorities for you? What is first other than of course the humanitarian needs?

**SAHNOUN:** Well, the first priority was to try to have an end to the large scale conflict, an end to the open hostilities, which to a large extent we have reached now. There isn't really, there's no fighting between the factions as such in most of Somalia, except in

the south, on the Kenyan border. Lately there was a flare-up there. But otherwise, we've been able to have a ceasefire. What we have to deal with really are bandits, looters, which are sometimes connected with clans, sometimes are just working for their own interests, for their own survival. Survival, as you said before, in as much as they are doing an indirect distribution. They sometimes loot to take all that food all the way to their tribal origin, where their origin is. It's sometimes hundreds of miles away. But they kill for that, and we cannot tolerate it. So we, that's -- our first priority was to have some kind of ceasefire, and I think we have done some great progress on that, to ensure the humanitarian distribution. That we have to check with the security and with the bandits and the looters. Thirdly, to try to have national reconciliation. We have made some progress on that. They all agree now to go to a national conference, all the leaders agree to go to a national conference, and even the interim government has promised that they will resign prior to the honoring of this national conference. With a time limit.

**LEYNE:** Ambassador, some critics have said the UN's too obsessed with the security situation. What do you think of the idea of just flooding the country with aid? Is it just practical just to almost dump the food in the country?

**SAHNOUN:** It certainly would help very much if we could have a massive humanitarian assistance. The big problem is security, we have it on the coastal line, near the ports, around the ports and around the airports. But the real starvation is inside, is deep inside the country. And now, thanks to the airlift, which has started only a couple of weeks ago, the US airlift, the Canadian airlift, and the German airlift operation, we're now getting into, the country, we're now penetrating the country, and we're getting into the bush and into the towns, and that's where we've discovered

actually how great the disaster it is. I think about one thousand people are dying a day in these villages. So with this assistance, we can certainly help to ensure the security, if we could provide more airlift. Unfortunately we don't have enough. It's costly. I understand that people of course are hesitant before putting a great fleet of aircraft for this use, but we certainly are very, very grateful for those who have already started. Because that helps very much.

**LEYNE:** Will that help diffuse the security situation when there's more food around? It won't be used as a currency.

**SAHNOUN:** Oh, I think it would certainly help. The problem is that in Somalia we not only had about three years of civil war, actually, it started in '88 we, we also had successive droughts. And there is no real economic -- there has been no economic life for years in Somalia.

**POUR:** First of all, I'd like to know, Ambassador, you spoke to Raghida about sort of a reconciliation conference. I'd like to know when that might be held. And secondly, it was over three months ago that the UN authorized, if I remember correctly, the deployment of troops. They still haven't been deployed. Could you tell us what is the problem now for the actual deployment of UN troops?

**SAHNOUN:** I'll begin with the second question. It's true that we actually reached an agreement with one of the warlords in a sense in early August to deploy troops in Mogadishu. It took us almost two months to bring them fully into Mogadishu. That's one of the problems we face, unfortunately. The other troops which have to be deployed, it's in the northeast, and we expect -- we have already the agreement which to the extent they will be deployed in November.

It has to do with logistics, it has to do with a number of factors which are outside my own competence anyway. And we also hope to be able to deploy troops in Kismayu. Kismayu, unfortunately, is a town which is changing hands regularly. So we really have to look at how we should do it. Should we force ourselves in, get the troops, without even waiting to discuss? Because it did happen that I reached an agreement with one faction, but a few days later that faction lost control of the city. So it's a very complex situation, and we would have to look, I think the Security Council has to look seriously into that matter and see what we should do. We are supposed also to deploy troops in the northwest. That is the part which has declared independence, which has suceeded, which is called Somaliland now. They are willing to have the troops, but they in a sense, they want to almost to put as institution, that we should also recognize de facto their independence, which will not be possible for the United Nations to do. So we are still negotiating with them. We were supposed to have troops deployed in Kenya on the border, and that would be able to ensure the security. Because even in Kenya we do have security problems around the refugee camps, so we have to ensure also some security along the border, because there are flow of refugees back and forth. So we are negotiating with the Kenyan authorities for the deployment of these troops.

**POUR:** Should the Council intervene now? Is it the time for the Council to intervene, to put more pressure, either on the factions, or in any way should the Security Council intervene?

**SAHNOUN:** Well, the Security Council can, as you know, can always of course intervene, or make statements, which can be pressure put on these various leaders, various warlords. Certainly warn them that if they don't co-operate with the UN that they should bear the consequences of the disaster of the situation in Somalia.

Yes, I think that we should constantly remind the warlords there, that they hold a great responsibility in what is tantamount to genocide of their own people.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Ambassador Sahnoun, the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, has made the remark that the Security Council's pre-occupation with the situation in former Yugoslavia, what he termed the "rich people's war," has diverted attention from the situation in Somalia. Is that a valid criticism, do you think?

**SAHNOUN:** I don't think he put it that way, really. I think he was --

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Well, he was reported to have put it that way.

**SAHNOUN:** Well, he was referring to the fact that we should give as much attention to the situation in Somalia as to the other crisis, and I think he's right. Yes.

**DERGHAM:** Have we in the media -- I know you've been trying to get this issue of Somalia at least to be covered by the international media, and there was, at one point we heard an explosion of interest, and then there is no longer -- at least not a consistent interest. Have we in the media failed the Somalis as much as the UN has?

**SAHNOUN:** There was certainly very little interest for a long time on the situation in Somalia. I think it was around the month of August, that -- July, August -- that we had a number of media organizations sending their reporters, and that the world really did have an idea of the depth of the disaster. But no doubt that other crises sometimes of course have a priority, and we see much more coverage on what is happening in former Yugoslavia than what's

happening in Somalia. And in a sense, understandably so. After all, you look at your neighbour's situation before somebody who is far away.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Ambassador Sahnoun, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**. Our guest has been Ambassador Mohammed Sahnoun, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Somalia. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Raghida Dergham, of Al-Hayat, of London; John Leyne, of the BBC; and Afsani Bassir Pour of Le Monde.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

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